Testimony and Film Leave Mrs. Kennedy's Actions a Mystery

To the Editor: 6/26/94

"Zapruder Film Contradicts the Warren Report" by Dennis Dalrymple (letter, June 14), following "What the Film Shows" by William O'Neill (letter, May 27) illustrate how amateur students of the John F. Kennedy assassination can misinterpret evidence or repeat false reports.

Both were responding to Anna Quindlen's statement in "An Era Ends" (column, May 21) that a split second after the President was fatally shot, Jacqueline Kennedy "came out of her seat and onto the back of the car, on her hands, on her knees, on some desperate journey never fully understood."

Professor O'Neill believes the Zapruder film shows Mrs. Kennedy climbed half out of the car to save Clint Hill, a Secret Service agent, who had run onto the car's trunk during the fatal sequence of shots. But frame by frame enhancements of the film show Professor O'Neill is mistaken.

Mrs. Kennedy does not even look at the car's rear when Clint Hill is running toward the limousine. She is already on the trunk when she is startled by the leaping Hill, and as he pushes his arm toward her, she slides back into the car's bench seat.

Moreover, Mr. O'Neill states that Mrs. Kennedy and agent Hill "both fell into the car." Again, not true. The film shows that Hill never entered the car, but lay on the rear, desperately holding onto metal grips on the trunk.

Mr. Dalrymple states that "it would have been better to turn to Mrs. Kennedy's testimony." He fails to do that, instead writing that, according to her interview published in William Manchester's "Death of a President," "she crawled onto the limousine trunk to retrieve a portion of her husband's skull." Mr. Manchester draws no such conclusion.

Mr. Manchester wrote, "Indeed, Mrs. Kennedy has no recollection of being on the trunk at all." In Mrs. Kennedy's Warren Commission testimony (June 5, 1964), she stated: "You know, then, there were pictures later on of me climbing out the back. But I don't remember that at all."

Mr. Dalrymple uses his false premise to conclude that an assassin must have shot the President from the front of the car, not the rear, where Lee Harvey Oswald, the only assassin at Dealey Plaza, was in his home-made sniper's nest. (In any case, the car was moving forward close to 11 miles an hour, and some of the President's wound matter flew over the rear of the car as it sped along.)

For almost three decades hundreds of conspiracy books have speculated about the Kennedy assassination, many irresponsibly. Historians and the public should demand that those who discuss the case present credible and supporting evidence for their statements.

GERALD POSNER

New York, June 15, 1994.

The writer is author of "Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of J.F.K." (New York, 1993).

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Bad Temper? Me?

To the Editor:

I appreciate "First Out of the Chute: Bob Dole" (editorial, June 19), welcoming my interest in the 1996 Republican Presidential nomination. However, while I haven't made any decisions about the 1996 race, you appear to have made some about me that need to be addressed.

People say a lot of things about Bob Dole, but "bad temper" isn't one of them. Tough? Hard-nosed? Competitive? Sure. Bad temper? Not according to the people who know me best.

(Senator) BOB DOLE
Republican Leader

Washington, June 20, 1994.